



Final Report

Kansans Mobilizing for Direct Support Workforce Change: A statewide workforce development initiative to resolve the direct support workforce crisis

Assuring the adequate recruitment, retention, and competence of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) is a significant barrier to the growth, sustainability, and quality of community services for people with disabilities in Kansas and across the United States. The creation of acceptable DSP wage and benefit packages continues to be an ongoing challenge and is critically important. However, it is also essential to acknowledge other aspects of the direct support workforce crisis in Kansas. The difficulties of developing a sufficient and well-prepared workforce are complex and multifaceted. The need to develop effective responses to these difficulties is immediate. Few opportunities for pre-service training exists and many DSPs are ill-prepared for the diverse skill sets they need to effectively do their jobs in supporting the state's most vulnerable citizens.

In October 2002, the Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities (KCDD) brought together a group of stakeholders within Kansas to create statewide systemic change in direct support workforce development. Committed to this initiative, the KCDD awarded a grant of \$600,000 managed cooperatively by the Research and Training Center on Community Living at the University of Minnesota, Kansas University Center on

Development Disabilities (KUCDD), and Human Services Research Institute (HSRI) from Cambridge, Massachusetts. This advisory committee included stakeholder representatives from the following groups: Community Developmental Disability Organizations (CDDOs), community service providers, self-advocates, DSPs, frontline supervisors, families, Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS), InterHab, The Alliance, KUCDD, Department of Education, Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), Workforce/Labor and others.

Together, project partners worked over two years to reduce turnover and vacancy rates within participating organizations and family employers. In addition to improving workforce issues within specific organizations and families, the Advisory Committee worked to address the workforce challenges facing providers and individuals receiving support throughout Kansas.

This final report provides information on project participant's accomplishments, improvements in quality services for individuals in Kansas receiving supportive services, and strategies and tools that can continue to be built upon to improve the workforce situation throughout Kansas.

Accomplishments

The accomplishments achieved during this project have been plentiful and can be seen effecting positive changes in the Direct Support Professional (DSP) workforce in Kansas.

"It has been a worthwhile experience, truly an opportunity to learn and grow as individuals and agencies. We appreciate the vision of the DD Council in funding this project for two years and continuing to support the outcomes as we continue the work."

~ Creative Community Living

"This project provided great resources and materials which will have value for a long time to come, including the Realistic Job Preview, DSP Recruitment Toolkit, Removing the Revolving Door curriculum and links to other resources."

~Lakemary Center, Inc.

"The trainings that I attended were absolutely wonderful! It was exciting to come back to my agency with a toolbox filled to the brim with ideas. We were facing many challenges, and I received great ideas on how to resolve those issues."

~Mosaic

"The RJP video has really helped our recruitment process to be more rounded and helped us with choosing the right person for the job."

~Johnson County Developmental Supports

"Being able to access quality training material specific to this industry was very helpful (Power of Diversity Training and Removing the Revolving Door curriculum)."

~KETCH

Skills and product development

Throughout the course of this project, frontline supervisors and managers worked diligently to acquire additional skills that allowed them to provide competency based training to DSPs and make system changes within their organizations, thus improving the quality of supports individuals with disabilities received. Two-hundred-eleven people received training on DSP workforce issues during the project. In that time, 24 people completed additional training to become trainers themselves, thus increasing the capacity within Kansas to continue the effort to address workforce challenges within Kansas. Those people trained 381 additional people.

In addition to developing professional skills during the project, a number of products were also developed. These products include —

- **"Realistic Job Preview"** — a video used to give potential employees detailed and balanced information about the employer, the worksite, and job expectations. Employee candidates use the information to make an informed decision about a job offer from the employer.
- **DSP Recruitment Toolkit** — a set of marketing tools and techniques used to attract and recruit quality staff into direct support roles.
- **Ad Astra Direct Support Apprenticeship and Credentialing Program** — this educational and job training program was piloted by two community service providers. The Standards of Apprenticeship for DSPs were registered by the Kansas Apprenticeship Council.
- **Kansas-customized College of Direct Support (CDS)** — an Internet based, multimedia, competency-based training curriculum for DSPs with Kansas-specific content. Over 4,000 CDS lessons are available.



Workforce initiatives

Project participants created a number of workforce initiatives to continue the efforts of Kansans Mobilizing For Change (KMFC). The initiative that these professionals demonstrated has been remarkable —

- **Kansas Chapter of the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals (NADSP)** — an organization created for DSPs throughout Kansas. DSPs are encouraged to join and help develop the group's mission, initial goals, and a plan for its future.
- **Kansans Mobilizing for Direct Support Workforce Change Day** — a proclamation made by the Governor.
- **KMFC Strategic Plan** — a tool used to advocate at the state legislature for increased wages and benefits for DSPs. The initiative provided expanding opportunities for individuals, families, and organizations to participate in KMFC and its work groups to make a difference in the lives of DSPs and the individuals they support.

"Credentialing has been a big thing for ISS. Six DSPs finished all of their work for the Ad Astra Direct Support Apprenticeship Program's Initial Proficiency Certificate. They are more successful, more respectful to clients, supervisors, and parents. It's been a really positive experience for all."

~Individual Support Systems (ISS)

"We have been able to reduce travel expense in our large, rural service area by utilizing selected lessons from CDS as an online new staff orientation. We hope to open this up to all staff as the budget allows and technology is available in our rural locations."

~DSNWK

"The College of Direct Support has been a big success ... We've seen some big changes in self-confidence and in developing leadership skills."

~TARC, Inc.

"CDS is such a wonderful training tool."

~Families Together

"The College of Direct Support online training has been very beneficial for my agency."

~Sunflower Home Health



Improved services for individuals with disabilities

As we know, the quality of life for an individual with a disability is greatly impacted when they experience seemingly constant turnover in their direct support staff. Through this project, and its successes in turnover reduction (see Table 1), the quality of life for Kansans with disabilities has improved. At the start of the project, 40% of agency participants reported that they limited provision of services to new individuals with disabilities due to their workforce crisis. Only 15.4% reported their workforce challenges forced them to limit new services in the final year of the project.

"As a society we must move to a place where we view direct care as a long term professional choice rather than simply another job."

~ CLASS LTD

"I believe that our new employees are going into the homes better prepared to do their jobs than ever."

~ Hartford, Inc.





Reduction in staff turnover

Overall in the 12 organizations that completed the interventions, there was a 15% reduction in DSP turnover from their baseline assessments in 2002 through project completion in 2004. Even more exciting, turnover for frontline supervisors declined 29% from the baseline level. These findings suggest that the greatest impact of the project's technical assistance and training models in the first two years of implementation is on supervisors, but that a healthy decline in DSP turnover could also be detected by the end of the second year. Vacancy rates for frontline supervisors declined from 3.1% in 2002 to 2.4% in 2004. Vacancy rates for DSPs remained steady, increasing slightly from 6.3% in 2002 to 7.7% in 2004 (see Table 1).

Finally, the 12 organizations experienced a decline from 47.6% to 41.7% in the proportion of leavers who stayed with the organization less than 6 months.

Table 1. General workforce outcomes	2002	2003	2004
DSP turnover	57.9%	55.9%	49.2%
Frontline supervisor turnover	23.2%	19.8%	16.4%
DSP vacancy rate	6.3%	7.4%	7.7%
Frontline supervisor vacancy rate	3.1%	4.3%	2.4%
Percent of DSPs leaving w/less than 6 months tenure	47.6%	42.9%	41.7%

Continued Efforts and Challenges

Despite the exciting success of this two-year project, additional work must be done to address the direct support workforce challenges that face Kansans —

- **Wage and benefits remain too low.** Additional funding is required to make significant and lasting improvements.
- **Competency-based training programs must be funded in order to be utilized routinely by agencies.** Competency-based trainings promote accountability of staff that in turn leads to high quality supports for individuals with disabilities.
- **DSP professionalization requires continued effort.** Through credentialing and apprenticeship opportunities, the direct support workforce in Kansas can continue to evolve into a highly skilled and recognized group of professionals.

"We have experienced decreased turnover, overtime, and expenses."

~Mosaic

"We have seen a significant reduction in our turnover rate in the first 6 months of employment."

~Sunflower Supports

"It continues to be a challenge to have the financial resources to pay for staff time (often times this means overtime) for staff to participate in the CDS and the additional trainings that we want to implement."

~Starkey

"The ripple effect has been incredible! From the initial intervention of mentoring, we have initiated participatory management, involved all interested staff in revamping new staff orientation and our senior DSP training modules, and helped start a chapter of the NADSP."

~Creative Community Living



Take Action

Learn more about how the participating agencies created change in their organizations. Project participants are eager to share their experiences — the struggles and the successes — with other agencies in order to continue making improvements in the direct support workforce across Kansas.

"This has been one of the most worthwhile projects that I've been a part of ... It is very exciting to know that the state of Kansas has chosen to help agencies continue the efforts started through this grant. Outcomes are important, but when addressing the vast and complex challenges of cultivating and retaining a solid, high-quality workforce, change comes slowly, sometimes over the course of several years. In addition, workforce issues are influenced by many outside factors over which we have no control. ... I hope that through continued support of these efforts, funders will look at both the qualitative and quantitative benefits of these interventions throughout the state of Kansas."

~ Arrowhead West, Inc.

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The Ad Astra Direct
Support Registered
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State Council recognize
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Apprentices/Candidates —

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The Kansas Alliance of
Direct Support Professionals
(KADSP.lsi.ku.edu), a
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recognizes these individuals
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founders of the Kansas
chapter.

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